

Matthew 22-12-11a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 11th of December, 2022.

And we're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew. We're in chapter 26. We're going to be moving a little bit forward, not far, but a little bit forward here in the chapter as we look at the Lord Jesus and his words to his disciples in the upper room.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessings on our fellowship and on our study. We'll begin. Father, we're grateful for another time of fellowship, another opportunity to refresh our souls at the oasis of your word, to spend time in the green pastures and beside the still waters and have our souls restored.

We thank you for this portion of your word, the words and the works and the example of the Lord Jesus are so fruitful for our reflection, our motivation to live the life that you have called us to. And we pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that the Holy Spirit will bless it to each heart, help us to see the pertinence and the application for what Jesus says here. And that as a result, we can shine as lights in our generation.

We can be a beacon of hope to those in our periphery and can prepare ourselves more fully for service and function now and in the ages to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Matthew 26, verse 26, as they were eating in the upper room, the night that Jesus was betrayed, arrested, sent to trial and resulting in his crucifixion the following day, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat, this is my body." In that connection, we have been looking at the breaking of the bread, symbolic of the suffering of the Lord Jesus and what scripture has to say about suffering in his case and in ours.

We have covered a number of passages already. And you know that the apostle Paul has a great deal to say about this in 2 Corinthians chapter four. Suffering is a witness to the life of Jesus.

This is where we left off last time and we pick it up this morning. So not losing our place in Matthew 26, we turn to 2 Corinthians chapter four. Now we have this treasure, Paul says, in jars of clay.

I think there was a Christian musical group that gave themselves that name. But once again, in four seven, we have this treasure talking about the light that God commanded to shine out of darkness, shining in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That is the treasure, the glory of God.

Our purpose, the reason we breathe air, the reason God had us born in the families, in

the locale, in the places and times, in the circumstances in which we appear is for his glory. This is potential until we make those decisions that enable God to fulfill that potential in us. It is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness.

2 Corinthians 4, 6, taking us all the way back to the first three verses of Genesis. After God creates the heavens and the earth, the earth is without form and void. Darkness is upon the face of the deep.

The spirit of God moves on the face of the waters and God said, let there be light. The God who commanded that light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is the light of creation, of new life, of new opportunity and new potential.

But, verse seven, we have this treasure in jars of clay, in earthen vessels so that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. When we power through life on the strength of our talent, our ability, our mental quickness, our anticipation of circumstance, our good planning, that does not necessarily reflect the glory of God. Kind of depends on why we do what we do, as in all other cases.

So Paul goes on to say here in verse eight, we are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed. We are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken.

Struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. Our suffering reflects the suffering of Christ when we are walking in the light, when we are pursuing the life of faith and obedience.

We can stumble, we can fall, but what is the pattern? What is our pursuit? What is our goal? Do our values and our priorities reflect bearing with the suffering and the death of the Lord Jesus so that his life can also shine in us? We can't have one without the other. In the same way that eternal life does not come for us, except through the death of the Lord Jesus, the life of fullness that partakes of the quality of the eternal, the quality of the divine is inextricably linked with that of the Lord Jesus. So what a profound statement.

We carry about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. To focus too much on one side or the other of that balance is to go astray, is to distort the picture. In this life, we have tribulation.

There are times when we are hard pressed, when we are oppressed, when we are crushed. Sometimes we are actively persecuted for our faith. Other times we are party to the suffering that is a concomitant of the presence of sin and evil in the world.

But with one comes the potential for the other. It is through the death that we partake of life. Notice we carry about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

The dying of the Lord Jesus is carried about in our living bodies. So that his life can also be manifested in our body. We who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

If it's an important point in scripture, it is repeated. And you see this in both verse 10 and in verse 11. Manifesting of the life of Jesus.

Ideally, when we are living the spirit-empowered, word of God-fueled life, we remember this. When we suffer, when we experience setback, when we are hard pressed, when we experience in our bodies, in our lives, the death of the Lord Jesus, which is purely a result of sin, we remind ourselves of the other side of that coin, which is the opportunity to have the life of the Lord Jesus expressed and manifested in us. Without one, you do not have the other.

And he repeats it. We are delivered to death for Jesus' sake. Now, Paul the apostle is a very potent example, being imprisoned, being beaten, ultimately being executed for the faith.

And we say, well, I'm no apostle Paul. I'm not being persecuted to death. I have not suffered to the point of blood, as it says in another place.

But we are all delivered to death. Inevitably, our physical existence is not perfect. Our bodies are susceptible to all kinds of breakage, failures, diseases, accidents.

And even if you could avoid all of those, the inevitable disintegration that is built into this human life. We are allotted three score and 10. And if by reason of strength, you reach 80, you're blessed.

We're able to beat that by maybe a decade to a decade and a half now. But few of us see the century mark from our initial birth. Why is that? There is the loss of access to the tree of life.

There is the loss of sustained and perfect physical existence due to sin. So we are always delivered to death in some sense. I was in the home of a gentleman this past week who was hale and hearty, worked as a carpenter, had a thriving business and contracted diabetes, which led to osteomyelitis, which led to the softening and eventual disintegration of his limbs to the point that he's now missing one leg and half of a foot.

He was a very dedicated musician, played in this area with some very famous other musicians, but can't play anymore because his hands don't work right. And he's wheelchair bound and he's got a music room full of wonderful guitars and amplifiers and keyboards, but they are now inaccessible to him because of suffering in the body, bearing in our bodies death, the death of the Lord Jesus. However, he is a believer.

And although he is pressed on every side he is not crushed. Although he is perplexed, he

is not in despair. Why? Because along with the suffering and the death of the Lord Jesus comes life and renewal.

We're going to see this in a very potent passage from the Old Testament that anticipates the words of the Lord Jesus in our 2626 of Matthew passage. But here, look at verse 13. After saying, death is working in us, but life in you, Paul says in the same way that each of us bears both death and life as a testimony in our bodies, the body of Christ, his original body and the body as it now exists in the church also has some portions that suffer and others that experience the opportunity to manifest life.

Not everybody in the body of Christ is suffering equally all at the same time. It depends. So in this particular case, Paul says in verse 12, death is working in us, the oppressed and persecuted, imprisoned and beaten apostles, but life in you believers in Corinth through the suffering of some parts of the body, other parts are benefiting.

And Paul is able to write these letters that are sponsored by suffering. You realize if Paul had never been imprisoned, a good chunk of the New Testament would be missing, which we call the prison epistles. If Paul had been able to visit all of the churches that he wanted to see and fellowship with and enjoy personal contact, we wouldn't have the letters that have sustained, Christians have sustained the body of Christ for century after century after century.

It is through Paul's sufferings that he is forced to spend time sitting in a prison cell, the Holy Spirit congealing and coagulating and coordinating thoughts that he then through an emmanuensis sets down on parchment and they are relayed to the churches. And these become a blessing that I doubt Paul actually foresaw. I don't think he was conscious that the letters he was writing with his care and concern for each of these churches to whom he writes would eventually become a part of scripture on a par with the Old Testament scriptures that he loved so much.

The law and the prophets and the writings of the Old Testament, Paul's letters are included in the same bound book that contain those for us. He may or may not have realized that, but I am sure he could not have imagined how many of us there are. I was off on another tack, you know, when you're in a boat on a lake and you're going across the wide middle and you can see big parts of the lake and then you see a little inlet someplace and you motor over there to go up a little ways and explore it.

And I find my mind doing this. I was thinking about something else, researching something else and came across the argument from atheists, which you've probably heard before that, and I think this is a favorite of Christopher Hitchens, a rather famous example of the new atheism before he passed away and now he knows better. But to say that if Christ is the answer and Christianity is the means of salvation, what about all of these people who lived beforehand and had no shot? What about all of the, you know, looking at the record of evolution, which of course they believe in more firmly than we

believe in scripture, and that there were generations and tens of thousands of years of people leading up to the historical phase where we begin to have records, but there were prototypical people coming out of Africa and moving to the Middle East and so on and what science has deduced from DNA and whatnot, that there were just untold generations of people and all of that was a waste.

How wasteful is it that God would expend all of these lives, all of these generations, all of these millions of people and not bring Jesus Christ until some 2000 years ago? It's inefficient. God, if there were a God, he wouldn't be so wasteful and profligate with the setup for the coming of Jesus Christ, without whom no one has eternal life. This is the argument.

Well, I think it was William Lane Craig pointed out a statistic saying, do you realize that of all of the people that have ever lived, 98% of them have lived after the time of Christ. Less than 2% of all the people who have ever lived are BC. Better than 98% and this was 10 or 15 years ago he said this, it's probably an even higher percentage now looking at the population of the world and how rapidly it is growing, but less than 2% of people.

So the vast majority of the human race has had the opportunity to hear about the Lord Jesus. And you do have to have some preparation for anything that you do. There has to be some background, there has to be some setup and God revealed himself from Adam forward.

So the anticipation of the Lord Jesus applies to maybe a percent and a half of the human race and his real incarnation, his actual work on the cross has been available by means of communication for better than 98% of people. This of course is looking at it from a purely physical perspective and discounting the role of the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment and God's ministry to people who were going to be interested in him in Old Testament days, patriarchal days. But even from a physical perspective, the numbers are interesting.

But death is at work in us, but life in you, verse 12. And since we have the same spirit of faith according to what is written, I believe and therefore I spoke. We also believe and therefore speak.

Notice, Paul says, we, he's using the plural here for himself and his close associates who are suffering intense persecution and great oppression being pressed on every side, but not quite crushed. He says, we believe and therefore we speak. His suffering is an opportunity for faith and the communication of that faith to others, the manifesting of the life of the Lord Jesus in and through our flesh.

This is one of the primary ways of viewing our suffering in terms of its value in the plan of God. As with anything, whatsoever things are true, honest, good, noble, lovely, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. And remember when we

looked at the translation of that verse, it can be translated to the extent that this is glass half full or glass half empty.

Paul says, when we consider ourselves and the oppression that we experience, we believe and therefore we speak. As the most oppressed examples within the body of Christ at the moment that he's writing this letter, he says, we believe and therefore we speak. This is written, it's an Old Testament scripture from Psalm 116, verse 10.

We believe and therefore we speak. Knowing, verse 14, that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus. We look at the suffering of the Lord Jesus, but look at the follow-through, look at the result, look at the benefit.

Not only is the Lord Jesus raised from the dead and given a body that is incorruptible and undefiled, but he is able to pass on that gift to us, an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled in heaven. And he will present us with you, those of us who are suffering manifestly in the flesh and you who are manifesting life. We manifest the suffering, you manifest the life.

Sometimes those roles will change, they will swap. They can be in different phases of our life. We have one opportunity or the other, but we will be all presented together.

All things are for your sakes, verse 15, so that grace having spread through the many might cause thanksgiving to abound to what? The glory of God. Ultimately and finally, it is our apprehension to find, to lay hold of, and to retain, those words should sound familiar, the glory of God, wisdom and understanding. That of course refers to Proverbs chapter three.

So this is Paul's message to the Corinthians. That's why he can say in Colossians 1.24, now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you. Paul puts his own personal suffering in the context of the body of Christ.

Participating in the sufferings of Christ, sharing the sufferings of Christ, bearing in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Paul says, you could think of this, I hope this isn't a stretch, but when you think about the body of the Lord Jesus Christ as he was being scourged, the scourge doesn't necessarily reach every square inch of his body. There is a part of his body that is being lacerated by that beating.

There is his forehead that is being pierced by the crown of thorns. There are his hands and his feet that are pierced by the nails. There are other parts of his body that are relatively untouched.

It doesn't minimize his suffering in any way, but some parts of his body are the targets of this horrific abuse. The entire body suffers because these parts are subjected to piercing and to beating and to whipping and so on. And this is how Paul views himself.

I am the part of the back that is receiving the lash. I am the part of the foot that is receiving the nail. I am the part of the lower arm and hand that is receiving the nail.

I am the forehead that is having that crown of thorns pressed into it. So this is why he can say, I rejoice in what I am suffering for you. Viewing himself as that pierced and broken part of the body of Christ, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.

It doesn't mean that Christ didn't suffer enough, but he is thinking about the physical body of Christ on the cross and about the spiritual body of Christ as it moves forward generation after generation. And we continue to see believers in our periphery, believers in our nation, believers around the world, suffering and experiencing hardship, sometimes persecution for their faith. Other times, just the suffering that is a part of sin and evil in the world.

And as one body, we recognize that while some parts are suffering, it is an opportunity for other parts to manifest life. What a tragic failure if that suffering within the body of Christ doesn't motivate reflecting his life, which is our opportunity when we're not suffering. And sometimes even as we suffer, we manifest that life.

But to suffer without manifesting the life would be a tragic loss of opportunity, a tragic loss of potential. So Colossians 1.24, I rejoice in what I am suffering for you and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church. For the sake of his body, which is the church.

So Paul will say in Galatians chapter six, verse two, bear one another's burdens. Be aware of and do what we can to support the burdens that others bear. And in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Christ suffers on our behalf. We enter into suffering on behalf of others. And when we see others who are oppressed, who are persecuted, who are carrying a heavy burden, we do what we can to put a shoulder under that load, bear one another's burdens, carry each other's burdens.

This way, you fulfill the law of Christ. Knowing that God is with us in that endeavor, this is an Old Testament principle, Isaiah 43, verse two. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. Notice you are not flying over the river. You are not born across the sea.

We pass through the waters, experience the waters. Anybody that has waded a deep river when it's not summertime will attest to how painful it can be. Cold, cold water is painful.

I've been in the Potomac River in the dead of winter and cold water is excruciatingly painful. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. The flames will not set you ablaze. He doesn't say, I will keep the flame far from you.

I won't let the fire get anywhere near you. He says, you will pass through it, but you will not be consumed. You will not be set ablaze.

You will be non-combustible. That's Isaiah 43, verse two. The 53rd chapter, Isaiah 53, three, reminds us of the example of the Lord Jesus.

A very familiar verse around Easter time. We don't quote it as frequently in the onrush to Christmas, but it's pertinent. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering.

And familiar with pain. As one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised. And we held him in low esteem.

James has a couple of pertinent allusions to suffering. James 1, 2, you can't get very far into his letter before he says, consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters. Whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. In verse 12, he says, blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord Jesus has promised to those who love him. In complete harmony with what Paul says, bearing with the suffering, bearing in our bodies the death of the Lord Jesus is an opportunity to manifest life.

So the crown of thorns turns into a crown of life. James 1, 12. Quoted it many times, John 16, 33.

I have told you these things so that in me, you may have peace. In this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart. I have overcome the world.

Death and suffering, swallowed up in life and triumph. It's not just a badge of life. It's not a sign in the yard of life.

It is a crown of life. It is a wreath of glory. It is an opportunity to be an implementer of God's plan and purpose.

Wearing a crown is a symbol of authority, opportunity to make a difference. We're gonna be seeing more about this shortly. Luke 14, verse 27.

Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. If we do not learn to recognize and exploit the opportunities that suffering provides, we cannot follow the Lord Jesus into that realm of glory and life and opportunity to walk with him, to rule and reign with him, to be of service to him and to reflect his glory and through him the glory of the father. We miss all of that if we cannot take up our cross and follow him.

Philippians chapter three, verse seven. Paul says, whatever was gained to me, I count as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things as loss compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have lost all things.

I consider them scubalon. I consider them rubbish. Waste.

In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness from the law, but that righteousness which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God on the basis of faith. It doesn't get any clearer than this.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. Being conformed to him in his death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead. As with the phrase eternal life, we shouldn't think of it just in terms of its duration.

It is quality. This is a similar phrase, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. This doesn't mean I just want to be raised up.

This is the fullness of resurrection. This is the fullness of that life that comes at resurrection. The opportunities and the fellowship of the Lord Jesus to share suffering as he experienced in this life is an opportunity to prepare ourselves to enter into the fellowship of his glory and his resurrection and his life in the future.

They are inextricably linked. One does not come without the other. If you cannot carry your cross, you cannot be my disciple.

If we are not a disciple, we are not going to enter into that life in its fullness. So we train our souls to view suffering in the light of the potential that it creates, not the hardship that we're enduring. And it is hard.

Pain is hard. Being oppressed is difficult. This is why God says it is in your weakness that my strength is made manifest, and it has to be God's strength.

If it comes from us, we're going to fall. The cross is going to flatten us. It forces us to the cross.

It forces us to look at the way the Lord Jesus bore his suffering, which was by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, believing the promises, the life of faith. I want to know Christ, Philippians 3.10, the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his

sufferings, being conformed to him in his death. And so, in a mysterious way, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Wonderful truth. Something we have to constantly revisit and refresh during those hard times. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we are going to continue in Philippians 3, picking up at verse 12. Let's pause here and take our break.